

Message Text

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45

ACTION AF-18

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 IO-12 ADP-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-09 H-02

INR-09 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-03 RSC-01 PRS-01 SS-14

USIA-12 AID-20 SSC-01 RSR-01 /142 W
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R 191530 Z MAR 73

FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1218

INFO USMISSION GENEVA

AMEMBASSY PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 1444

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, TS

SUBJECT: PARTIAL MINISTERIAL RESHUFFLE.

1. ON MARCH 17, PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA MADE FOLLOWING MINISTERIAL CHANGES AFTER THREE CONSULTATIONS WITH PRIME MINISTER NOUIRA MARCH 16 AND 17: TAHAR BELKHODJA NAMED MINISTER OF INTERIOR, REPLACING HEDI KHEFACHA, WHO SO FAR NOT NAMED TO NEW POSITION; DRISS GUIGA NAMED MINISTER OF EDUCATION, REPLACING MOHAMED MZALI, WITH LATTER IN TURN REPLACING GUIGA AS MINISTER OF HEALTH; TAIEB SLIM; FORMER MINISTER OF STATE, NAMED AMBASSADOR TO UN ORGANIZATIONS IN GENEVA, REPLACING BELKHODJA. GUIGA IS SIXTH MINISTER OF NATIONAL EDUCATION IN PAST FIVE YEARS, I. E., SINCE AHMED BEN SALAH HELD THE JOB. BELKHODJA IS FOURTH MIN INTERIOR IN SAME PERIOD. KHEFACHA REPORTEDLY OFFERED MIN STATE POSITION BUT SO FAR HAS NOT ACCEPTED.

2. COMMENT: MINISTERIAL CHANGES CERTAINLY REFLECT HARDENING OF BOURGUIBA'S POSITION, AND THAT OF GOT, ON MATTERS INVOLVING INTERNAL SECURITY, INCLUDING A TOUGHER LINE IN FACE OF POSSIBLE TROUBLES AT UNIVERSITY. BELKHODJA AND GUIGA ARE BOTH FORMER DIRECTORS OF SURETE NATIONALE. BOTH CLEARLY ENJOY CONFIDENCE AND TRUST OF BOURGUIBA. CHANGES MAY ALSO BE POLITICALLY SIGNIFICANT IN PRESENT
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CONTEXT. REPLACEMENT OF KHEFACHA AND SWITCHING OF MZALI FROM EDUCATION TO LESS SENSITIVE HEALTH MINISTRY MAY HAVE EFFECT OF SOMEWHAT WEAKENING PRIMIN NOUIRA' S POSITION (THOUGH WE HAVE NO EVIDENCE THAT THIS WAS BOURGUIBA' S INTENT). BELKHODJA' S APPOINTMENT TO INTERIOR WILL ALSO SERVE TO STRENGTHEN HAND OF FONMIN MOHAMED MASMOUDI AND THAT OF MOHAMED SAYAH, MINISTER PUBLIC WORKS. IN FACT, SAYAH WAS REPORTEDLY SLATED TO REPLACE CHEDLI KLIBI AT INFORMATION MINISTRY. THIS MAY STILL HAPPEN (MOST OBSERVERS BELIEVE ADDITIONAL MINISTERIAL CHANGES STILL TO COME), BUT BOURGUIBA MAY HAVE DECIDED HOLD OFF ON THIS FOR TIME BEING. BELKHODJA' S APPOINTMENT WILL ALREADY BE CONTROVERSIAL; HE DISLIKED BY MESTIRI " LIBERAL" FACTION OF PSD ALMOST AS MUCH AS SAYAH HIMSELF IS. WE WILL REPORT FURTHER AS REACTIONS COME IN .
SEELYE

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*** Current Handling Restrictions *** n/a

*** Current Classification *** CONFIDENTIAL

Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: n/a
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 19 MAR 1973
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: morefirh
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1973TUNIS01444
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: RR
Errors: n/a
Film Number: n/a
From: TUNIS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1973/newtext/t19730333/aaaaialx.tel
Line Count: 84
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: morefirh
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 15 AUG 2001
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <15-Aug-2001 by izenbei0>; APPROVED <27-Sep-2001 by morefirh>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: <DBA CORRECTED> wfs 971215
Subject: PARTIAL MINISTERIAL RESHUFFLE.
TAGS: PGOV, TS
To: AF
GENEVA
PARIS
SECSTATE WASHDC
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005